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SCENES IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

A THOUGHTFUL writer, celebrated for the profundity and originality of his reflections, remarks upon the interest with which we con-

which attaches to the early history of the United States, that grand confederacy, which has already extended its territory, multiplied its



THE FIRST MEETING OF THE ASSEMBLY IN VIRGINIA.



JOHN ELIOT PREACHING TO THE INDIANS.

template a trickling rill which we know to be the source of a mighty river, whose waters roll on with ever-increasing breadth till they reach the still more majestic ocean. Such is the interest

population, and increased its resources, with a rapidity and to a degree beyond all parallel, and appears destined to play a still more prominent part in the great drama of human affairs.

It is a little remarkable that, for about a century after the first discovery of America—during which interval Spain was extending her conquests and possessions in the southern continent, and France sent out several expeditions to the north with various success—England made scarcely any effort to establish a colony in the New World. It is true that some exception must be made in favour of the Cabots, two enterprising merchants at Bristol, who, within five years from that memorable achievement, began a career of discoveries on the coasts of Labrador and Newfoundland, which formed no unworthy sequel to so glorious a commencement. Speaking of the son, Bancroft says: “The career of Sebastian Cabot was in the issue as honourable as the beginning was glorious. He conciliated universal esteem by the placid mildness of his character. Unlike the stern enthusiasm of Columbus, he was distinguished for serenity and contentment. For sixty years he was renowned for his achievements and skill.”

But though the intercourse opened by these explorers between England and North America was never wholly suspended, it never, on the other hand, ripened into any important results. It was not till the connexion established between England and Spain by the marriage of Mary and Philip, that any adequate notion of what Spain had accomplished, or any desire to imitate her example, appears to have been entertained in this country. As soon as the desire was felt, it received all the encouragement which so enlightened and powerful a sovereign as Queen Elizabeth could afford it. She took the deepest interest in the project of planting an English colony in the polar regions of America, which were supposed to abound in gold and other mineral wealth. The zeal with which the accomplished Sir Walter Raleigh entered into such schemes is too well known to require any detailed description here. Undismayed by the disasters which attended his first expedition, in which the largest of his three vessels was wrecked, and a hundred persons lost—including Sir Humphrey Gilbert, his step-brother, and Parmenius, a Hungarian, who went out for the purpose of writing a history of the expedition—he determined to gain a footing for England on those shores; and without difficulty obtained a patent, giving him absolute authority, as Lord Proprietary, over all the territory which he might discover between the thirty-third and fortieth degrees of north latitude. Accordingly, he despatched two vessels, which reached the coast of North America in July—a time of the year most suitable for impressing the new-comers with favourable opinions of the country. They landed in Florida, and afterwards sailed to the island of Roanake, where they met with a most hospitable reception from the wife of the reigning chief. After a short stay they returned home, having their vessels well laden with cedar, skins, furs, and sassafras. On their arrival, they gave most animated accounts of the country they had visited; and the result was, that the virgin queen, who felt a pardonable exultation in having contributed to the discovery of so glorious a land, gave expression to her satisfaction by bestowing upon it the name of Virginia.

The territory to which this appellation was given, included that portion of North America which lies between the thirty-fourth and forty-fifth degrees of north latitude. It was divided into North Virginia, which was granted to a corporate body known as the Plymouth Company, and South Virginia, the property of another corporation called the London Company. Besides rendering homage to the British crown, they were bound to pay a rent of one-fifth of the gold and silver obtained, and one-fifteenth of the copper. The king was to be acknowledged the supreme authority over the colony, the government of which, with the exception of purely local affairs, was placed in the hands of a council in England. James I. even drew up a code of laws for the regulation of the colony, which, as might be conjectured from the narrow-minded pedantry of its author, breathed anything but a liberal and enlarged spirit. After a series of vicissitudes, including severe sufferings and heavy losses, which we cannot here detail, the colony at length struck its roots into the soil and began to flourish. In spite of the misdirection of the labour of the colonists to the manufacture of potash, soap, glass, and tar—articles in which they could not reasonably hope to compete with the nations on the Baltic—their industry before long became productive, wealth flowed in, and with the power it bestowed came the desire of more extended liberty. The natural

restlessness of a rising colony was still further increased by the evils of misgovernment. It was no uncommon thing for persons to obtain appointments, through the influence of the English council, for which they were altogether unfit. The prosperity resulting from the good government of one governor was counterbalanced by the ill effects of the tyranny of another. At length, in June, 1619, the foundation of constitutional liberty was laid by the convocation of the first colonial assembly at Jamestown—consisting of the governor, the council, and two representatives from each of eleven boroughs—the reform of many abuses, and the establishment of equal laws, representative government, and trial by jury. It is this interesting scene which our artist has chosen for illustration in the first of the accompanying engravings. Henceforward, the progress of the colony in freedom and general prosperity was uninterrupted. King James complained of what he termed, this “seminary to a seditious parliament,” and attempted to restrict its liberties; but it was now too late.

The scene represented in our second engraving is one of still deeper interest. It brings before us a most devoted missionary instructing the wild untutored red Indians in the sacred truths of Christianity, convincing them of the evils of their present condition, and directing their thoughts and aspirations to a better life hereafter. As these savage tribes saw the white men gradually encroaching on their territory, and living by its industrious cultivation in a degree of comfort and plenty which painfully contrasted with their own miserable neediness, they not unnaturally began to look upon them with an evil eye. Jealousy gave rise to quarrels, acts of violence committed by one party were avenged with frightful cruelty by the other, whole tribes were massacred, and colonies disappeared never more to be heard of, notwithstanding the most searching investigations. But with all this violence and barbarity there were instances of better feeling between the white and the red man. Eager as most of the Europeans were to acquire land and increase in wealth, no matter at what cost to the uncivilised Indians, there were others who had higher objects in view. They sought to raise the Indians to a level with themselves by teaching them all the arts of civilised life, and especially by imparting to them the blessings of a pure and holy religion.

One of the earliest of the labourers in this noble field of enterprise was Alexander Whittaker, whose active exertions in preaching to the Indians on the frontier of Virginia procured for him the honourable and well-earned title of “The Apostle of Virginia.” Another of this devoted band was Mayhew, “that young New England scholar,” as he has been styled, who sailed to England with a view to excite the zeal of his countrymen in the good cause, but was unhappily lost with the vessel in which he sailed. Such, however, was the influence of his example, that his father, though seventy years of age, undertook to continue his labours, and preached and instructed the Indians with great success till he had passed the advanced age of fourscore. As a striking proof of the success of his efforts, it may be mentioned, that though the Indians were twenty times more numerous than the whites in Massachusetts, they abstained from all attempt to injure them, and lived in firm friendship with them. Villages of “praying Indians” were established; and at the University of Cambridge an Indian obtained the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

But a still more remarkable instance of missionary zeal was afforded by John Eliot, “the apostle of the Indians,” who began to preach in the year 1616. We cannot do better than quote what Bancroft says of this excellent man:—“His benevolence almost amounted to genius. An Indian grammar was a pledge of his earnestness: the pledge was redeemed by his preparing and publishing a translation of the whole Bible into Massachusetts dialect. His actions, his thoughts, his desires, all wore the hues of disinterested love. Eliot mixed with the Indians; he spoke to them of God, and of the soul, and explained the virtues of self-denial. He became their lawgiver. He taught the women to spin, the men to dig the ground. He established for them simple forms of government; and, in spite of menaces from their priests and chieftains, he successfully imparted to them his own religious faith. Groups of Indians used to gather round him, as round a father; and, now that their minds were awakened to reflection, often perplexed him with their questions.”